

The Role of Dua Lipa as a Cultural Diplomacy Agent in Promoting Kosovo's Nation Branding in Europe

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ABSTRAK

Penggunaan soft power yang mutakhir melalui selebritas global memungkinkan kepada negara untuk memanfaatkan pengaruh figure terkenal untuk memperkenalkan negara tersebut kepada citra internasional seperti halnya Dua Lipa dalam mempromosikan negara Kosovo dalam lingkup masyarakat internasional di Eropa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjabarkan peran Dua Lipa sebagai agen diplomasi budaya dalam upaya nation branding Kosovo di kancah internasional. Dengan menggunakan teori diplomasi selebritis, penelitian mengkaji bagaimana Dua Lipa, sebagai salah satu ikon music global dengan memanfaatkan pengaruh internasional untuk dapat mempromosikan citra positif Kosovo. Pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan studi literatur dengan mengumpulkan sumber dari buku, jurnal, dan sumber media mainstream. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa adanya keterlibatan Dua Lipa dalam inisiatif seperti Festival Sunny Hill yang telah berkontribusi signifikan dalam membentuk nation branding global Kosovo, dengan menarik wisatawan internasional, dan mempengaruhi perubahan kebijakan seperti halnya liberalisasi kebijakan visa Kosovo untuk dapat berkunjung di negara Eropa.

Kata kunci: Dua Lipa; Diplomasi Selebritas; Nation Branding; Kosovo

ABSTRACT

The use of soft power through global celebrities allows countries to leverage the influence of famous figures to introduce themselves to the international community, as Dua Lipa did in promoting Kosovo to the international community in Europe. This study aims to describe Dua Lipa's role as a cultural diplomacy agent in Kosovo's nation branding efforts on the international stage. Using celebrity diplomacy theory, the study examines how Dua Lipa, one of the global music icons, leverages her international influence to promote a positive image of Kosovo. A qualitative descriptive approach with a literature review was used, and sources were collected from books, journals, and mainstream media. The findings reveal that Dua Lipa's involvement in initiatives such as the Sunny Hill Festival has significantly contributed to shaping Kosovo's global nation branding, attracting international tourists, and influencing policy changes such as the liberalization of Kosovo's visa policy for visits to European countries.

Keywords: Dua Lipa; Celebrity Diplomacy; Nation Branding; Kosovo



INTRODUCTION

Cultural diplomacy is one of the strategic instruments in building a country's image or nation branding amid increasingly complex global competition. In the era of globalization, soft power has become the key for countries to shape positive perceptions among the international community without the interference of military or economic power alone (Khatrunada & Alam, 2019). What is meant by this perspective is prioritizing the involvement of popular cultural diplomacy, which includes music, art, and entertainment that play a central role in shaping national branding narratives that can transcend the geographical and political boundaries of countries such as South Korea with the Hallyu wave, and Jamaica with reggae music, demonstrating that cultural diplomacy can change global perceptions and bring significant economic and political benefits (Adisti & Konety, 2025). In this context, the presence of public figures with global influence can be a strategic asset for a country to strengthen its identity and image in the eyes of the world.

On the international stage, small countries leverage this soft power by relying on non-state actors to strengthen their national brand. In this context, Kosovo, a country that declared its independence in 2008, has faced challenges in projecting a positive image to the world, as evidenced by its limited international recognition (Saliu & Lljunji, 2022). Several studies suggest that, in addition to state institutions, non-state actors such as artists and athletes have the capacity to shape narratives that influence global public perception of Kosovo (Tahiri & K, Armand, 2024). Therefore, this study focuses on how an international pop artist, Dua Lipa, has taken on the role of a cultural diplomacy agent in Kosovo's nation branding.

By 2024, Kosovo will be recognized by 102 of the 193 member states of the United Nations, but it still faces rejection from influential countries such as Russia, China, and five members of the European Union (Rexhepi, 2025). This situation requires Kosovo to maximize non-traditional diplomatic channels, including cultural diplomacy, to build its international legitimacy and reputation (Valon K, 2024). Nation branding has become one of the main strategies, where cultural elements are used to shape a positive image that distinguishes Kosovo from other countries in the Balkans (Kaneva, 2021). This strategy not only depends on government policies but also involves contributions from citizens and the diaspora who influence the global stage.

In a study written by Marina Vulović entitled *Performing statehood in Northern Kosovo: Discursive struggle over contested space* (Vulović, 2020). The author examines Kosovo's performative statehood practices through the Young Europeans campaign, which initiated a post-war cosmopolitan discourse to fight for international legitimacy. A study

written by Rinor Rexhepi et al. titled *The Impact of Sports Diplomacy on Improving Kosovo's International Image* (Rexhepi, 2025). This study explains the significant role of sports diplomacy in enhancing Kosovo's international image, particularly by highlighting the success of athletes like Majlinda Kelmendi and the participation of football teams in global events.

The paper reviewed by Imeri is titled *Efforts Towards Creating A National Brand In Kosovo (2008-2021)* (Imeri, 2022). Explains the planning and implementation of Kosovo's official branding campaign, highlighting the gap between the optimistic narrative and domestic realities in economic and infrastructure aspects. The journal written by Saliu titled *The Return of Media Diplomacy: Examples from Kosovo* (Saliu & Abrashi, 2023). Emphasizes the framing of Kosovo's media diplomacy, including television, social media, and international coverage. A study conducted by Labinot Hajdari titled *The role of sports and music in public diplomacy: the case of Kosovo* (Hajdari, 2019). Revealing the contribution of cultural events and sports achievements in strengthening Kosovo's creative and dynamic image, despite the potential for cross-promotion with official campaigns not yet being optimized.

There has been no explicit research on Dua Lipa's role in promoting Kosovo on the global stage, so this paper fills a research gap to provide an in-depth understanding of the role played by Dua Lipa herself in promoting the country. This study offers novelty in its research, although many studies discuss cultural diplomacy in the context of small or post-conflict countries like Kosovo, none have explicitly examined the role of global celebrities, especially Dua Lipa, in the country's cultural diplomacy. With the background of Kosovo having just gained its independence and still facing challenges in building a positive image on the international stage, the role of celebrities like Dua Lipa offers a new perspective on cultural diplomacy that is more inclusive of non-state actors. This is a perspective rarely found in the existing literature. Furthermore, the literature review in this study not only explains the cultural diplomacy carried out by Kosovo descriptively, but also attempts to integrate various perspectives in the literature to identify gaps or research gaps that have not been widely explored. This research focuses not only on developing a country's image in the political or economic sectors, but also emphasizes the role of culture, particularly through celebrities, in shaping a country's positive image through international platforms. This opens up space for a more in-depth discussion of the dynamics of cultural diplomacy based on non-state actors in small countries, a topic that has until now received little attention in international diplomacy studies.

This is demonstrated by the role of Dua Lipa's diaspora. As a singer born in London to parents of Kosovar-Albanian descent, Dua Lipa is a prominent artist who plays a significant

role in promoting Kosovo's image (Brodsky, 2024). With over 40 million monthly listeners on Spotify as of early 2025, she is one of the most-streamed artists in the world (Spotify Artist Data, 2025). Her presence on international stages such as the Grammy Awards, Glastonbury Festival, and global charity events indirectly brings Kosovo's name to an international audience. This is demonstrated by the role of Dua Lipa's diaspora. As a singer born in London to parents of Kosovo-Albanian descent, Dua Lipa is a prominent artist who plays a significant role in promoting Kosovo's image (Brodsky, 2024). With over 40 million monthly listeners on Spotify as of early 2025, she is one of the most-streamed artists in the world (Spotify Artist Data, 2025). Her presence on international stages such as the Grammy Awards, Glastonbury Festival, and global charity events indirectly brings Kosovo's name to an international audience.

In this context, Dua Lipa emerges as a unique and potentially transformative figure in Kosovo's cultural diplomacy. As a global artist with 88 million followers on Instagram and extraordinary commercial achievements in the international music industry, Dua Lipa represents a form of soft power that has not been fully explored in the academic context of international relations (Zulmi, 2024). In August 2022, Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani appointed Dua Lipa as Kosovo's Honorary Ambassador, recognizing her unparalleled and invaluable contributions to raising awareness about the Republic of Kosovo (Peters, 2022). This appointment was further solidified with the granting of Kosovo citizenship in August 2025, symbolically strengthening the formal ties between this global artist and her ancestral homeland (Media, 2025).

The issue of Kosovo's cultural diplomacy is essential to study from a social perspective because the country is still building international legitimacy amid the political dynamics of the Balkans (Saliu & Lljuni, 2022). Culturally, Kosovo seeks to assert its Albanian ethnic heritage while embracing post-conflict diversity, requiring actors capable of bridging local values into the global sphere (Vejseli & Kamberi, 2021). Sociologically, the phenomenon of cultural mobility triggered by diaspora figures such as Dua Lipa has given rise to transnational identity negotiation. From a communication studies perspective, the narratives constructed by these pop figures can serve as a new framework for shaping the image of a country outside the formal diplomatic arena. Therefore, a qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the symbolic, narrative, and experiential dynamics of actors in cultural diplomacy practices. The purpose of this study is to describe the meaning and experiences of stakeholders in cultural diplomacy practices driven by Dua Lipa, as well as to examine the narrative strategies produced in the context of Kosovo's nation branding. The focus of the study includes: (1) Kosovo's

transformation towards cultural diplomacy, (2) Dua Lipa's influence on Kosovo's international image.

This research has a dual contribution. Theoretically, it expands the literature on cultural diplomacy and nation branding by positioning public figures as central actors in a country's soft power strategy. It also provides insight into how diaspora identity can be articulated to strengthen a country's image in the eyes of the world. Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for policymakers, creative industry practitioners, and diplomatic institutions in designing effective cultural communication strategies, leveraging the power of public figures in building international reputation. Thus, this study is expected to enrich academic discourse and provide strategic recommendations for strengthening Kosovo's image on the global stage.

ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Dua Lipa, one of the most celebrated celebrities with Kosovo-Albanian heritage, has played a key role in rebranding Kosovo internationally, relevant to Cooper's theory of Celebrity Diplomacy. This theory explains how celebrities, through their significant influence, can become effective agents of cultural diplomacy, introducing their culture to the world and serving as representatives of their country in international relations (Cooper F. A, 2008). Dua Lipa, with her global status as a singer and songwriter, has utilized her international platform to introduce and build a positive image of Kosovo, a country still building its post-conflict global identity. In this context, the theory of Celebrity Diplomacy serves as a framework for understanding how celebrities and diplomacy can intertwine to optimize a country's image through individuals with global reach.

Cooper states that celebrities involved in global diplomacy are becoming increasingly important as communication technology advances and the credibility of international organizations declines. Celebrities such as Bono from U2 demonstrate how these figures can shape a country's image without relying on traditional diplomacy. Celebrity diplomacy offers an alternative for small countries like Kosovo to introduce themselves internationally by leveraging well-known individuals' popularity (Cooper F. A, 2008). In this context, Dua Lipa's role as a cultural diplomacy agent for Kosovo is highly relevant for strengthening its image and enhancing its international recognition.

Based on several case studies using framework analysis, it can be said that non-state actors were successful in achieving their planned objectives. This was the case in Kosovo, where non-state actors, namely Dua Lipa's presence on social media, reinforce her impact as a

diplomatic agent, in line with the growth of social media as a global communication channel that can reach audiences without geographical boundaries. As a celebrity active on platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, Lipa leverages the power of social media to introduce and share in-depth narratives about Kosovo's culture, history, and values. This aligns with Van Ham's perspective, who states that through social media and their involvement in social movements, celebrities can influence international public perception of their countries, increase attention to social issues, and build a positive image of their countries in the eyes of the world. (Ham, 2010). Thus, Cooper's concept of Celebrity Diplomacy is highly relevant to this study, as it provides a deeper understanding of how Dua Lipa, as a celebrity, acts as a diplomatic agent who leverages her popularity to enhance Kosovo's image and global awareness. This theory not only explains the role of celebrities in entertainment but also in fostering more positive international relations through their involvement in introducing cultural and national values to the world.

RESEARCH METHODS

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand the role and impact of Dua Lipa as a cultural diplomacy agent in Kosovo's nation branding on the international stage, which requires an in-depth analysis of social and cultural phenomena (Norman K. Denzin, 2017). Qualitative research enables researchers to understand more comprehensively how Dua Lipa, as a public figure, influences Kosovo's image and how her contributions can be observed in cultural diplomacy.

The author used literature studies to support this research and find relevant data related to the research topic. The data was taken from reports, journals, books, and mainstream websites. In addition, a descriptive approach was used to provide a clear and systematic description of Dua Lipa's role in Kosovo's cultural diplomacy and how her involvement in the music industry and international image can influence the country's brand. This approach aims to deeply describe the phenomenon being studied without making comparisons or manipulating variables. Through the descriptive approach, this research will reveal various factors that play a role in nation branding through culture and celebrities, as well as the long-term impacts of Dua Lipa's involvement in increasing Kosovo's international exposure (Jhon W. Creswell, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine the role of Dua Lipa as a cultural diplomacy agent in Kosovo's nation branding on the international stage. The primary focus of this study is how Dua Lipa utilizes her global platform to introduce Kosovo's culture and strengthen its image. Using Cooper's Celebrity Diplomacy theory, this study will explain how Dua Lipa, as an international celebrity, functions as an entertainment icon and an agent who builds positive international relations for her country. The discussion includes an analysis of the impact of social media, Lipa's involvement in international campaigns, and her contributions to Kosovo's nation branding. This study aims to provide new insights into how celebrity-led cultural diplomacy can strengthen a country's position, especially for those building a global identity.

The Transformation of Kosovo Post-Conflict

Kosovo, as a region that was once part of the former Yugoslavia, experienced a dark period marked by ethnic conflict between the Albanian majority and the Serbian minority. This conflict reached its peak in 1998-1999, leading to NATO military intervention, followed by interim governance by the United Nations (UN) through the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) (Visoka, 2011). The post-conflict period has been marked by significant challenges in rebuilding governance structures, maintaining security, and reconciling a divided society. From this perspective, Kosovo is at a critical stage in transforming itself from a region known for its conflict potential into a stable and open nation, including enhancing its capabilities at the international level. (A. Gashi & Amanyraouf, 2023).

The transformation of Kosovo from a post-conflict country to an open country is not only related to political or economic aspects, but also strategically relevant to efforts to introduce the country through culture as an instrument of soft diplomacy. As a country that declared its independence in 2008 following ethnic conflicts and a bloody war in the late 1990s, Kosovo faces significant challenges in building a positive image that seeks widespread recognition on the international stage (Edward N, 2018). The stigma of being a conflict-ridden country has left a deep negative impression, infrastructure damage, and inter-community tensions, making reconstructing national identity an urgent and complex agenda (Monk, 2017). In this context, culture is being elevated as a bridge to rebuild social cohesion and create a new narrative that can be accepted internationally.

Kosovo's cultural diplomacy is an important soft power tool for framing global public opinion and overcoming post-conflict stigma. Cultural programs and projects are implemented

gradually and systematically, from cultural heritage preservation, arts festivals, cultural exchanges, to promoting diversity and inter-community dialogue. In support of this, there is involvement from various non-state actors, such as cultural organizations, artists, and academics, who engage with international audiences through media and cultural events (Mehani, 2024). As a result, culture serves as a space for reconciliation while promoting the values of freedom, modernity, and multiculturalism that Kosovo seeks to uphold.

In this context, as the country transforms into an open country, Kosovo faces a unique demographic phenomenon as the country with the youngest population in Europe, with an average age of 30.5 years, and around 70% of the population under the age of 35 (Hoover, 2006). This uniqueness makes youth a strategic asset that can be leveraged to promote the image of a dynamic and progressive nation. The country's 2009 nation branding campaign, titled "Kosovo: The Young Europeans," explicitly represented a systematic effort to change the international stigma of a country associated with conflict and poverty into one full of optimism and future potential (Garcia & Filipe, Sara Brito, 2012). This campaign leveraged soft power through a youth-centric narrative emphasizing Kosovo's young generation's entrepreneurial spirit, optimism, and European aspirations.

Kosovo's institutional transformation towards becoming an open country is also reflected in its comprehensive European integration efforts, in which the EU agenda is the driving force for internal reform and institutional modernization (Desa, 2017). This process involves the implementation of European standards in various sectors, such as law enforcement, transparent governance, and the protection of minority rights (Communications, 2023). Kosovo has signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, which is an important step in its efforts to join Europe and is practically recognized as an independent state (Union, 2018). Although five EU member states have not recognized Kosovo's independence, the European integration process provides an institutional framework that allows Kosovo to participate in various European programs and cooperation as an equal partner.

The concept of openness in the context of Kosovo can be understood through the framework of progressive economic integration and liberalization. The Kosovo government has implemented various structural reforms to create a competitive investment climate while expanding trade openness with neighboring countries and the international community (Sörensen, 2009). Although the national economy still faces several challenges, including relatively high unemployment among young people, Kosovo remains consistent in its efforts to modernize its economy and integrate into the global economic order. (Grzegorzczuk, 2025).

In this regard, the information and communication technology (ICT) sector occupies a strategic position as a new growth engine. Its rapid development is driven by a young generation with high digital literacy, catalyzing digital transformation and strengthening the innovation ecosystem in Kosovo (Union, 2020).

Kosovo's cultural diplomacy strategy is now evolving from a defensive stance to a more proactive and open approach to international relations. Non-state actors, especially athletes and artists who have achieved global success, play an important role as cultural ambassadors who can transcend political barriers while introducing Kosovo through soft power, according to Mekaj (Mekaj, 2020). This demonstrates that cultural diplomacy can be an effective tool for countries still facing challenges in gaining official recognition, as it opens alternative channels for engaging with the international community beyond the formal political arena. (Melissen, 2005). Initiatives such as the Kosovo International Summer Academy and various cultural exchange programs underscore Kosovo's commitment to becoming more open to the world and building people-to-people diplomacy, gradually shaping a more positive international perception (Hajdari & Krasniqi, Judita, 2024).

Kosovo's transition to an open state reflects a unique model of post-conflict nation-building, combining traditional diplomacy with new approaches to cultural engagement and public diplomacy. The use of its young demographic as a strategic asset, the development of proactive cultural diplomacy, and a commitment to European integration demonstrate a shift from a defensive mindset to a more confident and open one. Despite ongoing challenges, such as full international recognition and internal reconciliation, Kosovo has transformed from a conflict-ravaged nation to a developing democracy with ambitions to contribute to the international community. This process offers valuable insights into how post-conflict nations can leverage cultural resources and demographic advantages to build international legitimacy and project a global positive image, while highlighting cultural diplomacy's importance as a powerful tool in nation-building and international integration in the modern era.

The creation of Sunny Hill by Dua Lipa as a promotional tool for Kosovo

The phenomenon of cultural diplomacy in contemporary international relations demonstrates a significant evolution from the traditional paradigm centered on state actors toward an approach involving non-state actors as the primary agents in influencing international perceptions and policies. In the era of globalization and digitalization, celebrity diplomacy has become an effective soft power instrument, with individuals playing a global role as cultural ambassadors capable of transcending formal political boundaries and creating

deep resonance at the grassroots level (Pajtinka, 2014). As the youngest country in Europe, Kosovo faces challenges regarding limited international recognition and suboptimal diplomatic legitimacy, presenting an interesting case study on how celebrity diplomacy can be a catalyst for transforming international image and building national soft power through innovative cultural platforms.

One of the dynamics in Kosovo regarding cultural diplomacy comes from Dua Lipa herself. The context surrounding the formation of Sunny Hill is closely tied to Dua Lipa's personal journey as a member of the Kosovo diaspora who experienced firsthand the impact of conflict and the nation-building process following independence (Patton, 2022). Born in London in 1995 to parents from Pristina who faced difficult circumstances due to the escalation of conflict in the former Yugoslavia, Dua Lipa represents the second generation of the Kosovo diaspora, characterized by dual identities and unique transnational connections (Rosney, 2024). Her phenomenal international success, with over 87 million followers on Instagram and album sales exceeding 25 million copies, provides a global platform that traditional Kosovo diplomats lack to share an alternative narrative about their country.

Sunny Hill was founded in 2016 through a collaboration between Dua Lipa and her father, Dukagjin Lipa. The motivation behind the creation of this festival, as explained by Dua Lipa to Clash Magazine, stems from an urgent need to address the misrepresentation of Kosovo that has persisted for over five decades, where the country is still predominantly portrayed through narratives of conflict, displacement, and political instability (Frigillana, 2017). Sunny Hill is not solely a music festival but a comprehensive nation-branding initiative that leverages the universal appeal of music to create positive associations and build emotional connections with an international audience (Filtr, 2025). The first festival, held from August 10–12, 2018, at Germia Park in Pristina, featured a prestigious international lineup including Dua Lipa, Martin Garrix, and Action Bronson, generating significant international buzz with over 52 million Google searches and coverage from leading global media outlets (P. Gashi, 2018).

Figure 1 – Sunny Hill in 2018



Source: Sunny Hill Foundation, taken from <https://sunnyhillfestival.com/shf-gallery/2018/#group=0&photo=6>

Sunny Hill embodies a cutting-edge approach to cultural diplomacy that blends entertainment value with subtle yet effective political messaging. The festival also promotes themes relevant to Kosovo's aspirations as a young, dynamic, and progressive country, using the 2022 campaign slogan “set me free,” which explicitly advocates for visa liberalization for Kosovo citizens (Telegrafi, 2022). The selection of international actresses who combine various music genres based on different ethnic backgrounds will demonstrate the values of diversity and inclusivity that Kosovo will project as part of its identity as a modern European country. The involvement of the Sunny Hill Foundation, a non-profit organization established to empower youth in promoting art in Kosovo, adds a dimension of compassion to strengthen the moral legitimacy of this initiative and demonstrates a long-term commitment to local community development (Foundation, 2025).

Figure 2 – Campaign Set Me Free in 2022



Source: Sunny Hill Foundation, taken from https://www.instagram.com/p/Cg1UOnvoMSZ/?img_index=1

The impact of Sunny Hill on Kosovo's economy shows a positive transformation in international tourist visit patterns, particularly after the first edition in 2018. Statistical data shows that the number of international tourists visiting Kosovo increased significantly from 192,761 in 2018 to approximately 287,000 in 2019, representing a rise of around 49% in just one year (Jonuzaj, 2019). The period from 2020 to 2021 hurt the entire national economy, including Kosovo (Millaku et al., 2022). During the recovery phase in 2022, there was an impressive increase of 60% compared to the pre-pandemic period of 2019, reaching 459,200 international tourists. This trend continued in 2023 with a 35% increase compared to 2022, reaching an estimated 619,920 international tourists, primarily attributed to the momentum created by the Sunny Hill Festival and other cultural diplomacy initiatives (Industry, 2023).

Table 1 – Kosovo Tourism Arrivals 2018-2024

Tahun	Number of International Tourists
2018	192,761
2019	287,000
2020	Data not available (COVID-19)
2021	Data not available (COVID-19)
2022	459,200
2023	619,920

Source: Compiled by the author, based on several relevant sources

From an economic perspective, Sunny Hill has become a significant economic catalyst for Kosovo's economy, with an estimated direct economic contribution of more than \$50 million per year to Pristina. The festival's positive impact extends across various economic sectors, starting with the hospitality industry, which has experienced a boom in accommodation and culinary services, and the transportation sector, which has seen an increase in demand for domestic and international travel (Goldberg, 2024). Data shows that each festival edition attracts between 40,000 and 100,000 visitors per day, many of whom are international tourists with high purchasing power, significantly contributing to foreign exchange earnings (Xharra J, 2024). This phenomenon provides direct economic benefits and creates long-term impacts through enhanced destination image and increased awareness of Kosovo as an emerging tourist destination in the Balkan region.

The role played by Dua Lipa through Sunny Hill also had an impact on the liberalization of Kosovo's visa requirements, which was one of the most tangible achievements of this cultural diplomacy initiative. The festival, held in 2022, became a vocal platform for the “set me free” campaign, which sought to abolish visa requirements for Kosovo citizens traveling to European Union countries. One iconic moment came from Colombian music star J. Balvin, one of the festival's guest stars. He wrapped himself in the Kosovo flag and delivered a message of hope to the audience, an action that went viral with the hashtag #VisaFreeKosovo, demonstrating how cultural events can serve as tools of diplomacy and create effective political momentum and international pressure (Isufi, 2022). This action had a tangible impact with the

implementation of visa liberalization policies on January 1, 2024, allowing Kosovo passport holders to travel to 27 European countries for 90 days within 180 days (Home Affairs, 2024). This demonstrates, as concrete evidence, that the Sunny Hill initiative impacts local communities and achieves symbolic victories that strengthen Kosovo's position in the European integration process, highlighting the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy as a tool for promoting the country.

Dua Lipa's efforts to establish Sunny Hill as a music festival venue to promote Kosovo have been met with a positive response from the Kosovan government. Dua Lipa was also awarded the title of Honorary Ambassador by the President in 2022, supported by a statement from Kosovan President Vjosa Osmani, who said, "You continue to make us very proud of your success. You have also become a role model for many women worldwide as an outspoken and meticulous activist. However, most importantly, what you have done for the people of Kosovo, in raising awareness of the Republic of Kosovo, is truly incomparable and invaluable (Andrea Dresdale, 2022)." This continued until 2025, when Dua Lipa herself received Kosovan citizenship from the President, an honor that praised her as one of the most iconic cultural figures in our country's history. This was followed by a statement from the President on his Instagram post: "Dua and Kosovo are inseparable. From the world's biggest stages to the hearts of millions, she has carried our story with strength, pride, and grace" (James, 2025).

Figure 3 – Dua Lipa named honorary ambassador of Kosovo in 2022



Source: Office of the President of Kosovo, taken from <https://president-ksgov.net/en/president-osmani-awarded-singer-dua-lipa-the-title-of-honorary-ambassador-of-the-republic-of-kosovo/>

Figure 4 – Dua Lipa granted Kosovo citizenship in 2025



Source: Office of the President of Kosovo, taken from <https://president-ksgov.net/en/madam-president-an-exceptional-honor-to-grant-today-by-presidential-decree-the-citizenship-of-the-republic-of-kosovo-to-dua-lipa/>

The impact of Sunny Hill has also provided a regional cultural ecosystem and creative industry in Kosovo, creating a domino effect in developing national soft power. The festival provides a platform for interviews and seminars, as well as a competitive message to local

talent to gain attention and build networks with professionals in the industry from various countries (Xharra J, 2024). This case study contributes to the development of Kosovo's creative economy, with the emergence of various supporting industries such as event management, sound engineering, visual arts, and digital content creation (Ministry of Industry, 2024). The positive effects of the festival create sustainable cultural events comparable to well-known European festivals like Coachella or Glastonbury, boosting the confidence of Kosovo's creative community and demonstrating that a small country can effectively compete in the global cultural market with the right strategy and professional execution.

The soft power dynamics provided by the Sunny Hill Festival and Dua Lipa's role as a diplomatic celebrity reflect a fundamental shift in Kosovo's diplomatic approach, which was previously defensive and has become more proactive and confident. As a non-state actor, Dua Lipa possesses access and influence that traditional diplomats lack. Her unique ability to engage directly with a global audience through social media platforms and the entertainment industry (Nic, 2024). Further enhances her impact. This demonstrates that non-state actors, particularly athletes and artists who have achieved international success, have successfully conveyed positive messages about Kosovo to global and regional audiences, filling a void that state actors cannot reach due to the limitations of formal diplomatic channels (Kraf, 2022). This also illustrates how cultural diplomacy is an alternative tool for international engagement, transcending political barriers and fostering people-to-people connections.

The long-term implications of the success of the Sunny Hill Festival extend beyond direct economic and tourism benefits, laying the foundation for a sustainable nation branding strategy that can be adapted and expanded for future development. The festival has positioned Kosovo as a credible player on the international cultural stage, providing a platform for sustained engagement with a global audience and setting expectations for quality and innovation in future cultural productions. The success in advocating for visa liberalization demonstrates that cultural diplomacy can yield concrete political results when implemented with sustained commitment. Additionally, the granting of Kosovan citizenship to Dua Lipa in July 2025 by President Vjosa Osmani strengthens institutional recognition of the contributions of non-state actors in national development and the shaping of international image (James, 2025).

Ultimately, the Sunny Hill phenomenon as a tool of Kosovo's cultural diplomacy reflects an innovative model of celebrity diplomacy that blends entertainment value with strategic nation branding objectives. The success of this initiative in changing international perceptions, promoting visa liberalization, increasing tourist arrivals, and positively impacting

the national economy through a cultural approach in international relations, particularly for small countries with limited diplomatic resources, such as Kosovo, is noteworthy. The constructed narrative offers valuable insights for other countries facing similar phenomena regarding international recognition and legitimacy building, demonstrating that soft power, when combined with cultural initiatives, can be an effective tool. Kosovo's transformation from a country synonymous with conflict into a dynamic and welcoming cultural destination demonstrates the power of consistent messaging, strategic partnerships, and authentic cultural expression in shaping the international narrative and building sustainable soft power capabilities in the contemporary era of globalization.

CONCLUSION

This study describes the role of Dua Lipa as a cultural diplomacy agent in nation branding efforts on the international stage. The study results reflect Dua Lipa's international popularity and her deep connection to Kosovo through her Albanian and Kosovar ethnic heritage and her career achievements, making her a non-state actor who has an impact on shaping global perceptions of Kosovo. This phenomenon supports the hypothesis that celebrity diplomacy, such as Dua Lipa's, can effectively enhance a country's soft power and contribute to its international branding, particularly for countries with limited diplomatic recognition.

The narrative in this study reflects that Dua Lipa's involvement in initiatives such as the Sunny Hill festival has become one of the tools for Dua Lipa to improve Kosovo's global image, which also impacts the country's economy with the arrival of international visitors. Thus, the cultural diplomacy carried out by Dua Lipa can be considered successful as it has changed the negative stereotypes about the country. The cultural diplomacy reflected in this initiative increases awareness about Kosovo. It paves the way for tangible political outcomes, such as the liberalization of Kosovo's visa policies within the European Union.

Ultimately, this study acknowledges its limitations, particularly its reliance on secondary data and the absence of direct interviews with those involved in the initiative. Further research could examine the long-term impact of celebrity-led cultural diplomacy on nation branding and conduct primary interviews with policymakers and local actors to deepen understanding of the mechanisms involved. In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of integrating soft power strategies, particularly those driven by global celebrities, to enhance a country's nation branding. It also provides important lessons for countries such as Kosovo seeking to improve their international standing through creative diplomacy. For policymakers,

this study emphasizes the potential of cultural diplomacy and the need to continue engaging global figures to promote national identity and build international recognition.

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